

the dolphin market ...

The Dolphin Market is one of the last of the privately owned neighborhood markets.

It is only half a block from where I live on Ocean Avenue in Seal Beach, California.

Its prices are considerably higher than at the supermarket; you are paying for the convenience. And the personal touch.

Also, you are at least able to feel that you are handing over your money to human beings, not to a symbol on the stock exchange. Human beings will save your Sunday Times for you.

The very human beings in question are named Kenny, Charlotte, and Brett.

Kenny, the owner, once played minor league ball in the Cincy organization. He still roots for the Reds against the Dodgers, the Cowboys against the Rams. He races hot rods and is a steadying influence on the young kids who hang out at the store. He has a good sense of humor, which he exercises largely at the expense of my wife's aversion to cooking and my own attraction to a nearly liquid diet. I usually have a few words for his distinguished selection of wines -- you have your choice of Gallo or Cribari. Kenny and I probably share as few political as athletic heroes, but as long as he doesn't start voting for Hitler or I for Stalin, it's not apt to be an issue.

Charlotte works days, so Charlotte sells me a lot of Excedrin. We discuss movies and Masterpiece Theatre and anything else that's in the papers or on our minds. She always has a cookie for my daughter. Sometimes the mail-lady joins our parleys. Since Charlotte has been married for a long time to a Navy man, it's possible we don't agree on every point of national interest either, but for some reason I can't recall us ever disagreeing.

Brett is a sophomore in high school. He gives my daughter handfuls of cookies. He looks like a lover not a fighter, but when tough guys give him shit, he always gives it back. He's not a punk. The girls his age have started hanging around his shift. He likes to

kid me, and with my long hair and beard and heft and absentmindedness, I bet I do sometimes strike him as awfully strange. He works out with the crates as if they were barbells. It's just the sort of thing I would have done myself at his age.

The Dolphin is a square drab building at the corner of Dolphin and Ocean, with a collection of beer signs in the window, and a collection of beer cans on a shelf above the counter.

I prefer it to Harrods, Les Galleries Lafayette, and Fortnum-Mason.

Of course, those other joints don't cash my checks.

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i go to the bank because
my wife is paying our babysitter
a few weeks' pay in advance
so that she'll have extra spending money
on her trip to mexico.
she says her husband will give her less
if he knows she has her own.
"we women stick together,"
my wife boasts.

shouldn't i then tip him off?
after all, he seems like a nice enough guy
and has even been known to drink in
the same bar i do.
no, i won't say anything,
it's not that big a deal
and anyway i have an aversion to squealing
that goes back to the jesuits,
who tried so hard to turn us into stoolpigeons
that they created a generation
as tightlipped as hardened criminals.

i also, however, have an aversion
to not writing anything
that i can see could work itself out
on the page.

who does or doesn't read my pages
is out of my control.